Brookline March 28. 1886

O come let us worship and bow down: let us
kneel before the Lord our Maker.

Ps. 95 – 6

The oldest books or fragments of books that we possess have to do with the subject of worship; and the most ancient inscriptions to be found on the ruined monuments and buildings of ~~the past~~ the past are chiefly occupied with expressions of honour and praise to some trusted deity. The growth of the world has by no means left behind this custom of primitive ages, but through all classes of men, from the highest to the lowest, the habit of worship still survives. Even without belief in God, the instinct has been strong enough, in certain places to found a "worship of humanity": in which a few people engage, apparently with much fervour and devotion. The motives that support this ancient and universal practice, appear to be, and always to have been, of two different kinds. There is first of all a disinterested impulse, (whose nature and meaning will presently demand our attention,) which impels men, irrespective of any gain to be thereby won, to pay a tribute of

reverence and gratitude to the giver of life and all its joys.- There has been, in the next place, and without doubt there still exists, a feeling that the favor of the almighty is contingent upon our expressions of praise; and that worship is a means of purchasing the blessings or avoiding the punishments which higher powers hold in store. It is plain enough that God has been conceived of, for the most part, as a Being pleased with the honors yielded to him by his earthly subjects and angered by their neglect to worship him. The motive which has helped very largely to build the altars, and supply the sacrifices of religion has been, in its highest form, simply that of self-protection, and has often degenerated into nothing better than a desire to procure some degree of indulgence in unlawful practices. The man who knows that he is transgressing the law, sometimes quiets his fears by the assurance that a little extra devotion to the observances of religion will

clear him of the wrath and penalty he is provoking. One more than suspects, that, if he could get inside the consciousness of many people who went this way to church on Sunday morning, he would find this leading thought to be that by praising God in the Sanctuary they were about to clear off the score entered against them in the Book of Life during the preceding week, or acquire sufficient merit to enable them to make a further draft upon through the week before them.
the patience of the Almighty. — We may admit the existence of these superstitious beliefs and desire entering into the support of much worship, and not undertake to defend against anything that may be urged to show the dangerous and immoral tendencies of such habits of mind. — I will not have assume even to limit the relative amount of worship paid from this unworthy class of motives. It may be one tenth, or nine tenths, or even a larger fraction of religious

custom that stands upon such basis; but this is, still, another inexplicable impulse of human nature which prompts to worship, which is untouched by our any trace of conscious selfishness. This grain of gold, though but a single grain, and surrounded by mountains of dross, is none the less pure gold, and as such is to be prized and ~~retained~~ preserved. This spiritual desire to find God and bow the heart before Him ~~is~~ is the source whence religion has its original life and power, and its ~~true~~ character and office are in no wise degraded by the false copies of it that grow out of ignorance and selfish fear. Much thought of this time that calls itself very wise and profound belongs its superficiality by taking the perishable forms of things for the things themselves. Indeed a popular notion of development has been pushed so far ~~that~~ as to invert the true order of nature, in more than one important instance; making the truth a kind of refinement and afterthought growing out of old errors, and not the bright image, going before those distorted and debased conceptions formed in

lower orders of intelligence. It will now scarcely be allowed, by many, that the great man has been a great power in shaping the public mind. Rather, it is held, that the rude elements in the life of the popular ~~of the popular life~~ have wrought themselves into shape, using some one individual as a convenient point or pivot about which to ~~chrystalize~~ crystallize. The real historic christianity is supposed to be represented by its cheap popular form, and the spiritual essence of it, to be a later invention or development, which ~~has~~ like ripe fruit, may now be broken off from the bough whereon it is found. So that on some who would persuade us that worship had its origin wholly in mere terror, and consequent desire to propitiate the forces of nature; and that gratitude or aspiration only came into the Temple, after superstition had well nigh completed the building. But did not the sun shine warm upon the prehistoric man? ~~Was he not capable~~; Perceiving

in that great light of day. The joy and comfort of his physical existence, was he not capable of expressing a pure thanksgiving for its boons? Do the birds sing, because they are afraid - unless they pour forth their daily ~~tale~~ amount of melody - the sky may fall and crush them? Why it is thought so essential and profound to treat all blessed and beautiful impulses of human life, on the hypothesis that they are transformed survivals of hideous and beastly passions, I, for one, have not been able hitherto to understand. I protest that, as to christianity, it came from christ precisely the most lofty and spiritual faith ever cherished by a living soul, and that human ignorance, though given the widest social scale to work upon, has never added to it one single item of use or beauty, but has only maimed and corrupted the truth which christ preached, by compounding it with the vain imaginations of a darkened mind. - As to worship, I insist that from the first, the best souls have worshipped in

spirit and in truth, not in pursuit of a fancied bargain with heaven, by which so much homage was to be exchanged for protection and prosperity; All that we know of the founders of the various religions shows them to have been exceptionally wise and noble, They are the true authors of the worship of later times, and the superstitions that have crept into vogue are but travesties and caricatures of their intent. The prayers and litanies of the truly devout are not the reflection, on clouds, of grotesque forms of selfishness burning below; but they are the beacon lights of the ages, and primarily relate devoted the dull reflected glow, when the rays of the spirit fall on minds of slavish fear. Black horror and despair are not the roots out of which the fair blossoms of piety have opened; but hope and joy have been the sources of religious faith; whose growths have been, distorted and warped into what

unsightly shapes we see,- From the beginning, as we may most reasonably believe, true worship was in the hearts of the purest and best; and they gave utterance to the words of praise that welled up within them,- not because they cringed before the power of heaven, or wished to favor upon its favor, but because they rejoiced to be alive, and to feel the beauty that the Lord had made. The dark and cruel rites by which the name of religion has been defamed, grew up, because wicked and brutal minds, seeing in noble souls the strength of an alliance with heavenly powers, sought such alliance for themselves, through the only methods they could understand, in their own wicked and brutal fashion. The pure in heart, have seen God at all times; but men of violence, true to their own nature, have sought to grasp the Kingdom of heaven with violent hands,-

I make this point, because I wish to put entirely aside all that kind of worship which is the expression of selfish desire, as being in

no word pertinent to the question. What worship is. If we were talking of friendship, should we turn, for information to that base counterfeit of friendly love and respect, under cover of which designing men pursue their schemes of selfish interest? Without doubt a certain amount of profound friendliness in the world, is only assumed to screen or further money making projects, and is dropped like a useless cloak, without a pang of sorrow or regret, when it has ceased to be available for such a purpose. But does any one consider that the uses, the possibilities and delights of friendship are in the least displayed or affected by this mere semblance of its uses? So if one should say, "to know what worship means and is, go study the worshippers wherever you can find them;" it is proper to answer that there is one kind of religious expression which comes from the heart, as a glad and free rendering of its homage, and another kind of ceremonial

piety, which is practised in a commercial spirit, as the means of gain. The first only is worship in any rightful sense, and the other is its dead form, without a soul. You may study heathen superstitions, "ghost" worship," and sacrificial rites, in the apparent modern fashion, to the end of this chapter, and it will mean nothing to you into contact with that first burst of joy and melody from the human spirit - found forth by the author of its being. when, as I suppose religion was born. At all events, this was put this book aside is sleep with faith says, not "I will ~~open no more~~ praises," but "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him;" and as wide as the separation is ~~also~~ between joyful confidence and abject cowardice, so great is the difference between the religion of trust and the religion of fear. You might as well dredge the salt sea for diamonds, as grope among the terror stricken rites of savage races for the beginnings of religion; and if in that search, some shining gem of thought

should be
now and again brought up from muddy
depths, you may be sure that it did not
grow out of soil and slime, but is the memorial
of a noble, joyous life, that once bore its
branches far above the darkened caves of ignorance
and fear.

Coming now, to some statement of what
worship truly involves and implies, the word itself
provides a sufficient key to its meaning. Worth-
ship! - As a name, it was first employed, to
designate a state of dignity or excellence. As an
act, it means the perception and acknowledgment
of a superior beauty, Majesty, or strength, Between man
and God, it is the creature feeling of the mind
and heart of his Creator, and it includes
such expressions of that feeling as satisfy the heart,
which is always striving to give befitting utterance
to its emotions. The purpose to use these
expressions as a means of procuring favor for
oneself, has nothing to do with worship, save
to invalidate its honesty, and destroy its influence

over his life. If I have grace to admire
the hero who has done a braver act that I
myself have found courage or opportunity to attempt,
I honor myself by the applause I bestow. But
if I sing his praises, and follow in his train,
with intent to lift my person into notice and
notoriety thereby, my compliments are turned to
vulgar flattery, and my admiration is worth
nothing to him or to myself. So with the
honor and thanksgiving which I return to my maker.
They are not from the heart, if I think my words
of praise are to give me preference in this regard over
other creatures who fail to render Him due reverence;
and my conception of Him is altogether low and
unworthy, if I suppose that He seeks or requires
the worship of his children, to add to His own
pleasure. My homage to Him is only genuine
and worth giving, when it is at least as honest
and disinterested, as that which a boy to the great
work of art upon which I only wish to feed my
hungry gaze, or to the generous, courageous deed,

of remembrance of which, my tears of pride and gratitude spring to my eyes. and my heart glows with a new sense of the priceless worth of this human life. — There is, I affirm, in all souls, at least the rudiments and germs of such a capacity. to delight in the infinite perfections of the all-embracing mind, and in the moral attributes that can be discerned through all his works. Apart from the speculation of Science and expert, a human nature feels an impulse, to worship and bow down, — to kneel before the Lord its maker, in enforced recognition of His boundless weight and glory. Being conscious of our weakness we come to Him with prayers and supplications upon our lips. But being made to feel His justice and His goodness, we bow our souls in adoration, to acknowledge the unrivalled splendour which shines from the beauty of holiness.

We start therefore from this impulse planted deep in the soul of man, to give expression to his awe and wonder, his reverence and praise,

in presence of that divine life, by which all
our ways are overshadowed. - But like every
other impulse this may be encouraged or discouraged,
it may be yielded to or repressed. - Under certain
conditions it may learn to speak confidently and
strongly, and under other conditions it may
grow shy and timid of putting forth its power.
Education will give it place and prominence,
among the channels through which the life
easily and naturally flows out,
or will push it into the background, where,
through disuse, it becomes rusted and clogged
like a neglected tool. - We have thought to
consider what are the moral uses of this
impulse, and of the worship to which it gives
rise; that we may determine whether it is worthy
of indulgence and cultivation, or if we do well to
put it one side as a useless relic of the past
~~and~~ for which a voice and a language are no longer
need to be provided. Any use it may be supposed
to have, by way of placating or pleasing the divine
mind, we have already banished out of the discussion.

It is well to say also, that if one proposes to compel his heart to worship, because that seems to be for its good, that is scarcely less horrible than the pagan notion of satisfying the Gods with fumes of incense and sacrifice. It is no question of forcing the heart against its inclination, but whether we will deny an impulse already existing till it is starved and powerless for lack of exercise, or will give it liberty to speak, till its feeble accents have acquired the strength and volume of triumphant and never silenced song.

It will be granted, that all true moral life is the attempt to reach an ideal which the mind has set before itself. No code of written commandments, however scrupulously obeyed, results in righteousness that is worthy the name. That kind of morality is formal, mechanical and lifeless. Character and conduct only breath forth a gracious spirit of winning and commanding might, when they are dominated by

some vision of ideal excellence which the life follows as its guiding star; and then only does the soul rise to great and heroic heights of moral achievement.- When, therefore, we say that worship is the soul's upward look, by which glimmers of heavenly grace and perfection sink deep into its adoring gaze, and stamp themselves upon the walls of its inmost consciousness, does not this show that the impulse which leads it to look up has a moral important mission to fulfil? In all true worship of God. the perfect goodness,- two perceptions are involved; that of a reigning power of perfect and holy, just and wise and just intent, whose subject I am, and by whose beneficence I am sheltered; and also the perception that I, who live by the unfailing assistance of this Infinite Love, stand face and heart before its majestic presence.- Neither of these perceptions can be brought home to us too often or too forcibly; and the worship which suffices

to cross their upon our sight, has a moral significance that we cannot afford to overlook.

How will you convince men who are filled with a stupid conceit that they, and the world, as things now stand, are sublimely glorious and commendable, of a gracious perfection, worth all their portion to attain? It goes much against the grain for many people to confess themselves in the old phrase "Miserable sinners" before the face of heaven; and we may grant that the ceaseless attempts of the Church to bring us under convictions of sin, has gone so far that some recoil needs to be made against it;- But on the whole, below the lowest and most abject depth of self-accusation to which the mind may fall, there lies that proud ~~temple of self-complacency, which is the self-complacent~~ temple of self-complacency, which is now and always taken by many souls to be the very type and symbol of sainthood.- The man who smites upon his breast, crying "God be merciful," has promise in him of rising to something that heaven can call good and

great, The man who simply stands and thanks God that he is not as others are, is hardened and rooted in his little groove of respectable mediocrity, till not even an earthquake can dislodge him. There is, of course, a degree of self-depreciation and distrust that is fatal to high endeavour. But ordinary human nature is not apt to err on that side. Commonly its failing is a disposition to mistake its opinions for the absolute truth; to elevate its wants and wishes into a position of too great importance, and to take itself a too conclusive credit for the little success it may have won. It is good for one to pause and reflect how minute a portion his is of the great world's life; how little he knows, and how feeble are his powers; how easily his judgment may be at fault; what circumstances and forces favouring have cooperated with him in his employments, and how small a sum of his actual attainments can be attributed to his own unaided will. —

of this worship had no other effect than to make men abstract and humble, by placing them in contrast with the great scene and course of life upon which they are so entirely dependent, it would abundantly justify the impulse from which it springs. — Tyrants, whether small or great, are not made of those whose hearts cry out, "And what am I that thou art mindful of me?" — but the oppressions under which the world has groaned, have been bolstered up by the domineering selfishness and pride which are utterly blind to their indebtedness and unworthiness. — Find out the man or woman who feels daily and hourly a consciousness of having been blessed beyond his or her deserts, one who says in sincere humility, "I am all unworthy that high words reposed in me," and you shall not find from such an one the hard and cruel acts or bitter words, which [illegible] utter wrongs in place of heavenly justice. But the heart is sufficiently hardened by living in

ids- bull right- and title to everything it has appended and it will think of no injustice or oppression that may stand between it and its aims, —

Our purpose and object of worship is, Jupon in man his sense of dependence, of his incompleteness of this life, of his spiritual poverty, and inability to give back to heaven the price of those advantages which he is privileged to enjoy, — But he is not brought to this low estimate of himself that he may be left there, wretched and despondent; for the same glimpse of heaven which shows him how little he has done, shows him also what great things there are to do, and fires his heart with a new emulation. — The poor drawing I have made, and which seems to me quite a work of art while I view it in the seclusion of my own room, I place beside the production of some master of color and form, and my portion of pride in my own performance dies out of me. But while I look from one to the other, the pale

and ~~a~~ inexpressive figures I have sought out-
-gained the glowing, soulful forms of one who
made his canvas do all but speak; my
hand which at first used down ~~like~~ a leaden
weight into folds of drapery, began to move
with new buoyancy, as the higher possibilities of
this painting all are revealed to me, and the desire to
create something real unworthy to the masterpiece
from which I have caught inspiration takes hold upon
me, -- So in worship, We are cast down, not
that our hope and courage may be destroyed, but
that seeing the grandeur and glory of that life
with which we may not now ~~be~~ venture to compare
ourselves, the goal before us may draw us on
to dare and accomplish any obstacle that intervenes,
If it were only a question of learning to copy
the different scenes which my pencil has
made, that does not seem worth such labor to
attain, But beyond his feeble accomplishment
shines out the strength and vigor of the eternal
hills; and if the many ages of striving, I can

express in my own soul something of that beauty and peace, I can feel no instant's doubt that the end will repay all this effort. — — In our ordinary work and intercourse, by our influence upon each other, and through our knowledge of the great lives of history, we are often subjected to conviction of our shortcomings, and quickened by a swift response of ~~emulation~~ emulative desire. But in worship, we should possess a means of continually renewing the springs of a better life, and high above the broken and defaced patterns of goodness which hang in our historic gallery of human saints, we should behold the even present divine splendor of the only perfect One. It is something to be visited by a mood in which we would give all lower possessions, to know the spiritual insight and strength of a great human soul whom we reverence and love. But vastly more it is to hear echoing in our hearts the command, "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect;" and to feel the charm of

that unfinished goodness, which no earthly image discloses,- Where shall we find among men the model patience and forbearance and love, as Christ has shown us these qualities in him who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"?- On this low level when we stand, instances are not plentiful in which men display a desire to do good to their enemies; but on the contrary the fashion of the world incites the aggrieved soul to repay every injury in its own coin, and if possible to make the blow of retaliation heavier than the one by which it has been provoked. We must lift our thought wholly above the atmosphere of our daily lives, into those calm and serene spaces where the Love of God broods eternally, and is not to be turned from its purposes by the anger and scorn of men. If we would realize how petty and ridiculous are the venomous, waspish stings, we administer to

each other, growing as eager upon the business as if the fate of the universe depended on the issue. Watch the deadly encounter of two hostile ants; how they fight as if the world stood still to observe! Then think that as their passion to us, so insignificant is our revengeful spleen to the great intelligence which looks down upon us from the heavens. Let us look up to that Almighty spirit, which, not in weakness or blindness, but in the fulness of its strength, continues its work, undisturbed by exhibitions of human folly and malignity, — and it must be that we shall turn back our gaze to earth somewhat shamed out of our passionate haste to smite those who have offended us.

Our worship of the highest, then, should reveal to us, at once the sad imperfection of what we have at present attained to, and the unspeakable riches of that life which governs ours, and toward whose perfections we are bidden to aspire. It is for no temporary or idle purpose

that the impulse to ~~instinct of~~ worship has been placed in man's soul, for rightly employed it is one of the most powerful of all agencies in pushing forward the world's moral and spiritual growth.— But you will say, Where does worship fulfil this high office, and how have men succeeded in making fit expressions for emotions of the heart so deep and sacred? Alas! here as elsewhere the ideal is far away from the actual — and we have no better chart to ~~guide~~ disjointed ~~disjointed~~ utterances by which to carry our thought and feeling to those high places, whither we would be able to send them. But let us make what use we can of the means at our command; let us encourage and help each other to put our hearts into words and songs of praise; and the worship that is in spirit and in truth, shall at last find a voice for its dumb yearnings, whose melody shall win all trembling souls from darkness and fear, to the joyous light and hope from that are their portion as children of a heavenly King.—